DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 078 714 FL 004 384

AUTHOR Elerick, Charles
TITLE An Instructional Model for Teaching "University" English to Mexican-American Bilinguals.
NOTE 6p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Biculturalism; *Bilingual Education; Bilingualism; *English; English (Second Language); Grammar; *Language Instruction; Linguistics; *Mexican Americans; Minority Groups; *Spanish; Teaching Methods; Teaching Techniques

ABSTRACT

The data and observations offered here represent a model for the organization of relevant facts of Spanish and English for use in teaching English composition to bilingual Mexican-Americans. This approach, amplified to include material from many facets of the grammars of Spanish and English, can provide the basis for teaching English to bilinguals in a way that respects bilingualism as an asset and as an accomplishment, while helping the student draw the lines that distinguish his two languages. (Author/SK)

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE COPY

ED 078714

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

AN INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL FOR TEACHING "UNIVERSITY" ENGLISH TO MEXICAN-AMERICAN BILINGUALS

CHARLES ELERICK

Implicit in the title of this paper is the assumption that we know what "university" English is and what the varieties of English spoken by Mexican-American bilinguals are like. In the case of "university" English this is true. This term is simply my notion of how to refer to the range of usage that is characteristic of the semi-formal to formal spoken and written English common to the university environs. I use this term because it avoids the fallacy of the "standard/non-standard" dichotomy and the negative connotations associated with "non-standard."

Contrary to the implicit assumption, almost nothing is known about the English of Mexican-American bilinguals except that individual dialects vary tremendously and range from native-like English to fluent but unnative-like English that evidences strong Spanish influence. This Spanish influence itself, is, in terms of various aspects of the grammar, extremely variable. Some speakers, for example, use sequences of tenses in conditional constructions that evidence Spanish influence and others do not. The same speaker who has Spanish-like conditional constructions may use English prepositions in completely native-like ways while his counterpart who has conditional patterns that are completely English-like may use certain English prepositions in ways that recall Spanish, and so forth in many aspects of the grammar.

Save for a few more or less isolated facts concerning phonology and lexicon, we are, at present, completely lacking the systematically gathered and analysed data that could afford us an adequate picture of the syntactic facts of these dialects of English. To complicate this situation even more, it is probably the case that the organizational characteristics of a grammar that might represent the facts proper to the internalized grammars of bilinguals

FL 004 384

may be significantly different from those attending a grammar that represents monolingual competence. At any rate the best we can do at this time is characterize the syntax of Mexican-American English and the nature of bilingual grammars.

One of the characteristics of languages spoken in bilingual situations is the multifaceted variability mentioned above. A second characteristic is the generality of application of borrowed rules and a third is an apparent greater optionality in the application of rules than that which is normal in the grammars of monolinguals.

Formally, there seems to be an actual sharing of components within the grammar or at least some mechanism of liason between analogous components.

The implication of this formal characteristic is the central theme in the theoretical aspect of this paper.

Before proceeding with the essential material to be dealt with, it is important that I discuss briefly the broader philosophy of instruction, particularly language arts instruction, to which the specific material to be presented is related.

All really purposeful instructional programs take into account both what the student knows and what he does not know but should. In addition, successful teaching approaches generally use what the student knows as a basis for inducing additional knowledge or understanding.

In the case of the instruction of the Mexican-American bilingual in English composition, the ideal sketched above is, strangely enough, nearly always cast aside. The simple fact that he speaks Spanish is ignored; his knowledge of Spanish is overlooked both from the standpoint of its being an asset and in terms of its being a factor in shaping his English. Instructional materials designed to provide the student with control over stylistically mature and purposeful syntax and lexicon with which he can express his maturing ideas are often of diminished benefit to the Mexican-American bilingual because the materials do not take into

account that substantial part of the student's linguistic awareness which is Spanish. Instructional programs in English for Mexican-American bilinguals that proceed under this handicap must be overhauled.

Also, with regard to pedagogical principles, the following should be noted. Composition instructors can teach in very explicit ways certain necessary conventions of format and presentation. They can approach matters of organization and rhetorical strategy at the various levels of discourse complexity in direct terms.

But the composition teacher's most difficult and most important job is to encourage his students to be habitually reflective and introspective with regard to their ideas and their linguistic resources. The bilingual student must be encouraged to consider his total situation as he attempts to control more and more closely his linguistic performance. Given the apparent nature of bilingualism and bilingual grammars, the alternative, to ignore part of his background, is nonsensical.

The following data from Spanish and English illustrate the similar yet distinct facts of syntax and lexicon in the two languages. Properly understood, these facts, and other analagous to them, can be of help to the bilingual in making his linguistic situation an asset while avoiding the pitfalls that it implies. It should be kept in mind that a key assumption underlying the following discussion is that bilingualism involves some interaction of analagous components of the grammar.

The data will be restricted to forms that illustrate the relationship that obtain between English sentences such as

(1a) They omitted all references to pygmies.

and

(1b) Their omission of all references to pygmies was unfortunate.

in which the relationship between the verb and the direct object in the first sentence is preserved semantically in "-sion" nominal +of +N portion of the second sentence. In the discussion I will

refer simultaneously to the data and its pedagogical implications.

Students should first be made aware of the essential similarity between English and Spanish that the following sentences exemplify.

(2a) Beto administraba el rancho con mucho éxito.
(2b) Su administración del rancho fue muy exitosa.
(2c) Bob administered the ranch very successfully.
(2d) His administration of the ranch was very successful.

Other Spanish and English verbs and their respective derived nominals that follow this pattern are resignar, resignación; resign, resignation; instalar, instalación; install, installation. There are hundreds of twined pairs such as these in English and Spanish.

There is so much essential predictability in this array of cognate vocabulary that one must assume that a bilingual manages some economy in his internalized lexicons through a kind of interlingual listing.

His lexical situation is complicated only slightly by the following very common types of English-Spanish correspondence, simple stem adjustment rules being available in both cases.

(5a) verificar, verificación
(5b) verify, verification
(6a) amplificar, amplificación
(6b) amplify, amplification
(7a) explicar, explicación
(7b) explicate, explication
(8a) dedicar, dedicación
(8b) dedicate, dedication

Despite the essential regularity of lexical correspondence between these forms of English and Spanish, there is some skewness in a few items that represents somewhat of a hazard to the bilingual in his tendency to seek lexical economy, and in doing so, to over generalize the relationships that exist between the two languages.

This lack of correspondence takes several forms. First among these is the simple lack of cognate forms in one of the two languages. Spanish

(9) turbar, turbación

and

(10) ubicar, ubicación

for example, have no equivalents in English. Bilinguals often attempt inter-lingual generalizations of forms such as these.

A second type of irregular correspondence involves configurations of items in which one form of the four is missing. Examples are:

(11a) pollute, pollution
(11b) ....., polución
(12a) collate, collation
(12b) ....., colación

This sort of irregularity is never important for the student's performance in English but will, if it is pointed out to him, be a basis for his increased understanding of the general linguistic situation in which he finds himself. An additional variety of interlingual disparity is seen in configurations such as this.

(13a) inspecionar, inspeción
(13b) inspect, inspection

In the Spanish pair the verb is derived from the noun while in the English pair the usual verb/noun derivational relationship obtains. This situation is more common in verbs such as *reaccionar* which participate in similar but distinct syntactic processes. Finally, there are verbs of this general type that evidence some semantic skewness. Consider the English forms

(14a) electrify, electrification

Semantically, the relationship is not consistent as it is in most of the items in the larger group. The corresponding Spanish pair

(14b) electrificar, electrificación

does maintain the semantic proportion.

The data and observations offered here represent a model for the organization of relevant facts of Spanish and English for use in teaching English composition to bilingual Mexican-Americans. This approach, amplified to include material from many facets of the grammars of Spanish and English, can provide the basis for teaching English to bilinguals in a way that respects bilingualism as an asset and as an accomplishment while helping the student draw the lines that distinguish his two languages.

University of Texas, El Paso